

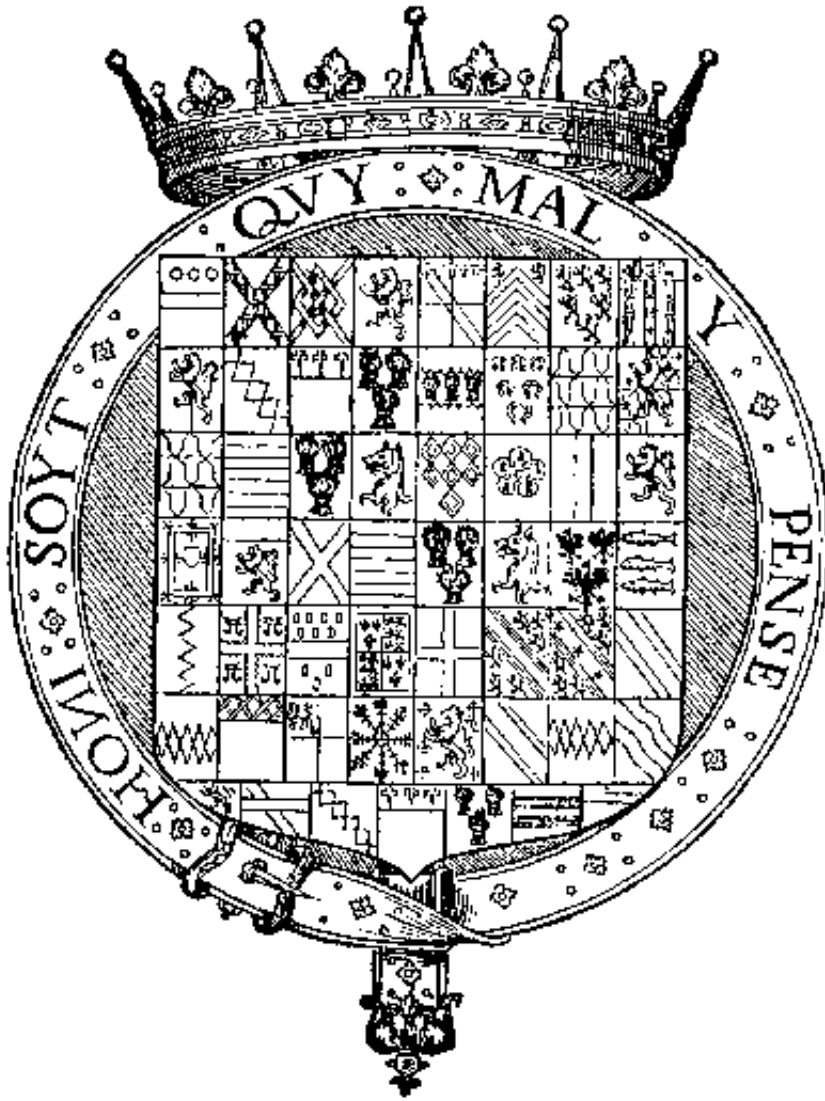
# PARADOXES OF DEFENCE,

WHEREIN IS PROVED THE TRUE  
grounds of Fight to be in the short ancient weapons,  
and that the short Sword hath advantage of the long  
Sword or long Rapier. And the weakenesse and imper-  
fection of the Rapier-fights displayed. Together with an  
Admonition to the noble, ancient, victorious, valiant,  
and most braue nation of Englishmen, to beware of false  
teachers of Defence, and how they forsake their owne  
naturall fights : with a brieve commendation of  
the noble science or exercising of  
Armes.

*By George Silver Gentleman.*



LONDON,  
Printed for Edward Blount.  
1599.



[ George Silver's *Paradoxes of Defense* was published in 1599. A companion volume, [\*Brief Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence\*](#), was not published until 1898 by Captain Cyril G. R. Matthey, based on a manuscript found in the British Museum. Today, this book is available in two editions: one, containing both books from the 1898 edition and a useful introduction, is in *Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals*, edited by James L. Jackson, and the other is a facsimile of only the 1599 edition of *Paradoxes*, published by Da Capo Press, Amsterdam, 1968.

A facsimile of Matthey's book can be found at: <http://www.sirwilliamhope.org/Library/Silver/Silver.php?title=Matthey&plate=4>.

For information about other primary sources for early fencing, please see:

<http://www.musketeer.org/online.html>

Also see this [Introduction and review](#) of Silver's 2 manuals.

A more general webpage giving primary sources for fighting manuals is at:

[http://www.aemma.org/onlineResources/library\\_H.htm](http://www.aemma.org/onlineResources/library_H.htm)

This is version 1.0 of the on-line version of this book. It was initially typed in from a facsimile of the Matthey edition by Steve Hick. I have lightly proofread it, correcting any obvious errors. However, subtle

errors and perhaps missing paragraphs probably remain. Please report any errors you discover to me.

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# PARADOXES OF DEFENCE,

Wherein is proved the true grounds of fight to be the short ancient weapons and that the short sword has advantage over the long sword or the long rapier. And the weakness and imperfection of the rapier-fights displayed. Together with an admonition to the noble, ancient, victorious, valiant, and most brave nation of Englishmen, to beware of false teachers of defence, and how they forsake their own natural fights. With a brief commendation of the noble science or exercising of arms.

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To the right honorable, my singular good lord, Robert, Earl of Essex and Ewe, Earl Marshall of England, Viscount Hereford, Lord Ferrers of Chartley, Bouchier and Louaine, Master of the Queens Majesty's horse, & of the Ordinance, Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, Knight of the most Noble order of the Garter, and one of her highness most honorable Privy Council.

Fencing (Right honorable) in this new fangled age, is like our fashions, every day a change, resembling the chameleon, who alters himself into all colors save white. So fencing changes into all wards save the right. That it is so, experience teaches us, why it is so, I doubt not but your wisdom does conceive. There is nothing permanent that is not true, what can be true that is uncertain? How can that be certain, that stands upon uncertain grounds? The mind of man a greedy hunter after truth, finding the seeming truth but changing, not always one, but always diverse, forsakes the supposed, to find out the assured certainty, and searching everywhere save where it should, meets with all save what it would. Who seeks & finds not, seeks in vain. Who seeks in vain, must if he will find seek again, yet all in vain. Who seeks not what he would, as he should, and where he should, as in other things (Right Honorable), so in fencing: the mind desirous of truth, hunts after it, and hating falsehood, flies from it, and therefore having missed it once, it assays the second time. If then he thrives not, he tries another way. When he has failed, he adventures on the third & if all these fail him, yet he never fails to change his weapon, his fight, his ward, if by any means he may compass what he most affects, for because men desire to find out a true defence for themselves in their fight, therefore they seek it diligently, nature having taught us to defend ourselves, and Art teaching us how, and because we miss it in one way, we change to another. But though we often chop and change, turn and return, from ward to ward, from fight to fight, in this constant search, yet we never rest in any, and that because we never find the truth, and therefore we never find it, because we never seek it in that weapon where it may be found. For, to seek for a true defence in an untrue weapon, is to angle on the earth for fish, and to hunt in the sea for hares. Truth is ancient though it seems an upstart. Our forefathers were wise, though our age accounts them foolish, valiant though we repute them cowards. They found out the true defences for their bodies in short weapons by their wisdom, they defended themselves and subdued their enemies, and those weapons with their valor(1). And (Right Honorable) if we have this true defence, we must seek it where it is, in short swords, short staves, the half pike, partisans, glaives, or such like weapons of perfect lengths, not in long swords, long rapiers, nor frog pricking poniards: for if there is no certain grounds for defence, why do they teach it? If there be, why have they not found it? Not because it is not so. To say so, were to gainsay the truth. But because it is not certain in those weapons which they teach. To prove this, I have set forth these my Paradoxes, different I

confess from the main current of our outlandish teachers, but agreeing I am well assured to the truth, and tending as I hope to the honor of our English nation. The reason which moved me to adventure so great a task, is the desire I have to bring the truth to light, which has a long time lain hidden in the cave of contempt, while we like degenerate sons, have forsaken our forefathers virtues with their weapons, and have lusted like men sick of a strange ague, after the strange vices and devices of Italian, French, and Spanish fencers, little remembering, that these apish toys could not free Rome from Brennius's sack, not France from the King Henry the Fifth his conquest. To this desire to find out truth the daughter of time, begotten of Bellona, I was also moved, that by it I might remove the great loss of our English gallants, which we daily suffer by these imperfect fights, wherein none undertake the combat, be his cause never so good, his cunning never so much, his strength and agility never so great, but his virtue was tied to fortune. Happy man, happy dolt, kill or be killed is the dreadful issue of the devilish imperfect fight. If the man were now alive, which beat the masters for the scholars fault, because he had no better instructed him, these Italian fencers could not escape his censure, who teach us offense, not defence, and to fight, as Diogenes' scholars were taught to dance, to bring their lives to an end by Art. Was Ajax a coward because he fought with a seven folded buckler, or are we mad to go naked into the field to try our fortunes, not our virtues. Was Achilles a runaway, who wore that well tempered armor, or are we desperate, who care for nothing but to fight, and learn like the the pygmies, with bodkins, or weapons of like defence? Is it valorous for a man to go naked against his enemy? Why then did the Lacedemonians punish him as desperate, whom they rewarded for his valor with a laurel crown? But that which is most shameful, they teach men to butcher one another here at home in peace, wherewith they cannot hurt their enemies abroad in war(2). For, you honor well knows, that when the battle is joined, there is no room for them to draw their bird-spits, and when they have them, what can they do with them? Can they pierce his corslet with the point? Can they unlace his helmet, unbuckle his armor, hew asunder their pikes with a Stocata, a Reversa, a Dritta, a Stramason or other such tempestuous terms? No, these toys are fit for children, not for men, for straggling boys of the camp, to murder poultry, not for men of honor to try the battle with their foes. Thus I have (Right Honorable) for the trial of the truth, between the short sword and the long rapier, for the saving of the lives of our English gallants, who are sent to certain death by their uncertain fights, & for abandoning of that mischievous and imperfect weapon, which serves to kill our friends in peace, but cannot much hurt our foes in war, have I at this time given forth these Paradoxes to the view of the world. And because I know such strange opinions had need of stout defence, I humbly crave your Honorable protection, as one in whom the true nobility of our victorious ancestors has taken up residence. It will suit to the rest of your Honors most noble complements, to maintain the defence of their weapons whose virtues you profess. It agrees with your Honorable disposition, to receive with favor what is presented with love. It sorts well with your Lordship's high authority, to weigh with reason, what is fit for marshal men. It is an unusual point of your Honor, which wins your Lordship love in your country, to defend the truth in whomsoever, and it adds a supply to that which your Lordship have of late begun to your unspeakable honor and inestimable benefit, to reduce the wearing of swords with hilts over the hands(3), to the Roman discipline, no longer then they might draw them under their arms, or over their shoulders. In all or any of these respects, I rest assured that your Lordship will vouchsafe to receive with favor and maintain with honor these Paradoxes of mine, which if they be shrouded under so safe a shield, I will not doubt but to maintain with reason among the wise, and prove it by practice upon the ignorant, that there is no certain defence in the rapier, and that there is great advantage in the short sword against the long rapier, or all manner of rapiers in general, of what length soever. And that the short staff has the advantage against the long staff of twelve, fourteen, sixteen or eighteen feet long, or of what length soever. And against two men with their swords and daggers, or two rapiers, poniards & gauntlets, or each of them a case of rapiers, which whether I can perform or not, I submit for trial to your Honors martial censure, being at all times ready to make it good, in what manner, and against what man soever it shall stand upon your Lordship's good liking to appoint. And so I humbly commend this book to your Lordship's wisdom to peruse, and your Honor to the Highest to protect in all health and happiness now and ever Your Honors in all duty,

## **AN ADMONITION to the noble, ancient, victorious, valiant, and most brave nation of Englishmen.**

1

George Silver having the perfect knowledge of all manner of weapons, and being experienced in all manner of fights, thereby perceiving the great abuses of the Italian Teachers of Offense done unto them, and great errors, inconveniences, & false resolutions they have brought them into, has informed me, even for pity of their most lamentable wounds and slaughters, & as I verily think it my bound duty, with all love and humility to admonish them to take heed, how they submit themselves into the hand of Italian teachers of defence, or strangers whatsoever, and to beware how they forsake or suspect their own natural fight, that they may by casting off these Italianated, weak, fantastical, and most devilish and imperfect fights, and by exercising their own ancient weapons, be restored, or achieve unto the natural, and most manly and victorious fight again, the dint and force whereof many brave nations have both felt and feared. Our plowmen have mightily prevailed against them, as also against masters of defence, both in schools and countries, that have taken upon them to stand upon school tricks and juggling gambols. Whereby it grew to a common speech among the countrymen "Bring me to a fencer, I will bring him out of his fence tricks with down right blows. I will make him forget his fence tricks, I will warrant him." I speak not against masters of defence indeed, they are to be honored, nor against the science, it is noble, and in my opinion to be preferred next to divinity, for as divinity preserves the soul from hell and the devil, so does this noble science defend the body from wounds & slaughter. And moreover, the exercising of weapons puts away aches, griefs, and diseases, it increases strength, and sharpens the wits. It gives a perfect judgement, it expels melancholy, cholerick and evil conceits, it keeps a man in breath, perfect health, and long life. It is unto him that has the perfection thereof, a most friendly and comfortable companion when he is alone, having but only his weapon about him. It puts him out of fear, & in the wars and places of most danger, it makes him bold, hardy and valiant.

And for as much as this noble and most mighty nation of Englishmen, of their good natures, are always most loving, very credulous, & ready to cherish & protect strangers, yet that through their good natures they never more by strangers or false teachers may be deceived, once again I most humbly to admonish them, or such as shall find in themselves a disposition or desire to learn their weapons of them, that from henceforth as strangers shall take upon them to come hither to teach this noble & most valiant & victorious nation to fight, that first, before they learn of them, they cause a sufficient trial to be very requisite & reasonable, even such as I myself would be contented withal, if I should take upon me to go in their country to teach their nation to fight. And this is the trial: They shall play with such weapons as they profess to teach withal(4), three bouts apiece with three of the best English masters of defence & three bouts apiece with three unskillful valiant men, and three bouts apiece with three resolute men half drunk. Then if they can defend themselves against these masters of defence, and hurt, and go free from the rest, then are they be honored, cherished, and allowed for perfect good teachers, and what countrymen soever they be. But if any of these they take fail, then they are imperfect in their profession, their fight is false, & they are false teachers, deceivers and murderers, and to be punished accordingly, yet no worse punishment unto them I wish, than such as in their trial they shall find.

**There are four special marks to know the Italian fight is imperfect, & that the Italian teachers and setters forth of books of defence, never had the perfection of the true fight.**

The first mark is, they seldom fight in their own country unarmed, commonly in this sort, a pair of gauntlets upon their hands(5), and a good shirt of mail upon their bodies. The second mark is, that neither the Italian nor any of their best scholars do never fight, but they are most commonly sore hurt, or one or both of them slain.

The third mark is, they never teach their scholars, nor set down in their books any perfect length of their weapons, without which no man can by nature or art against the perfect length fight safe, for being too short, their times are too long, and spaces too wide for their defence, and being too long, they will be upon every cross that shall happen to be made, whether it shall be done by skill or chance, in great danger of death, because the rapier being too long, the cross cannot be undone in due time, but may be done by going back with the feet, but that time is always too long to answer the time of the hand, therefore every man ought to have a weapon according to his own stature, the tall man must have his sword longer than the man of mean stature, else he has wrong in his defence, & the man of mean stature must have his weapon longer than the man of small stature, else he has wrong in his defence, & the man of small stature must beware he does not feed himself with this vain conceit, that he will have his weapon long, to reach as far as the tall man, for therein he shall have great disadvantage, both with the making of a strong cross, and also in uncrossing again, and in keeping his point from crossing, and when a cross is made upon him, to defend himself, or in danger his enemy, or to redeem his lost times. Again, rapiers longer than is convenient to accord with the true statures of men, are always too long or too heavy to keep their bodies in due time from the cross of the light short sword of perfect length, the which being made by the skillful out of any of the four true times, upon any of the four chief actions, by reason of the uncertainty & great swiftness in any of these times, they are in great danger of a blow, or of a thrust in the hand, arm, head, or face, & in every true cross in the uncrossing, in great danger of a blow upon the head, or full thrust in the body or face, and being taken in that time & place, the first mover in uncrossing speeds the rapier man of imperfect length, whether it is too long, too short or too heavy, and goes free himself by the direction of his governors.

The fourth mark is, the crosses of their rapiers for true defence of their hands are imperfect, for the true carriage of the guardant fight, without which all fights are imperfect.

**Of six chief causes, that many valiant men think themselves by their practices to be skillful in their weapons, are yet many times in their fights sore hurt, and many times slain by men of small skill or none at all.**

The first and chief cause is, the lack of the four governors, without which it is impossible to fight safe, although a man should practice most painfully and most diligently all the days of his life.

The second cause is, the lack of the knowledge in due observance of the four actions, the which we shall call bent, spent, lying spent, and drawing back. These actions every man fights upon, whether they are skillful or unskillful, he that observes them is safe, he that observes them not, is in continual danger of every thrust that shall be strongly made against him.

The third cause is, they are unpracticed in the four true times, neither do they know the true times from the false, therefore the true choice of their times are most commonly taken by chance, and seldom otherwise.

The fourth cause is, they are unacquainted out of what fight, or in what manner they are to answer the variable fight, and therefore because the variable fight is the most easy fight of all others, most commonly do answer the variable fight with the variable fight, which ought never be but in the first distance, or with the short sword against the long, because if both or one of them shall happen to press, and that in due time of either side's fight be changed, the distance, by reason of the narrowness of space, is broken, the place is won and lost of both sides, then he that thrusts first, speedeth: if both happen to thrust together, they are both in danger. Therefore things sometimes by true times, by change of fights, by chance are avoided.

The fifth cause is, their weapons are most commonly too long to uncross without going back with the feet.

The sixth cause is, their weapons are most commonly too heavy both to defend and offend in due time, & by these two last causes many valiant men have lost their lives.

## **What is the cause that wisemen in learning or practicing their weapons, are deceived with Italian Fencers.**

There are four causes. The first, their schoolmaster are imperfect. The second is, that whatsoever they teach, is both true & false; true in their demonstrations, according with their force & time in gentle play(6), & in their actions according with the force & time in rough play or fight, false. For example, there is much difference between these two kinds of fight, as there is between the picture of Sir Beuis of Southhampton and Sir Beuis himself, if he were living. The third, none can judge of the craft but the craftsman, the unskilled, be he never so wise, can not truly judge of his teacher, or skill, the which he learns, being unskilled himself. Lastly, & to confirm for truth all that shall be amiss, not only in this excellent science of defence, but in all other excellent secrets, most commonly the lie bears as good a show of truth, as truth itself.

## **Of the false resolutions and vain opinions of Rapier men and of the danger of death thereby ensuing.**

4

It is a great question, & especially among the rapier men, who has the advantage, the thruster or the warder? Some hold strongly, that the warder has the advantage. Others say, it is most certain that the thruster has the advantage. Now, when two do happen to fight, being both of one mind, that the thruster has the advantage, they make all shift they can, who shall give the first thrust, as for example, two captains at Southhampton even as they were going to take shipping upon the key, fell at strife, drew their rapiers, and presently, being desperate, hardy or resolute, as they call it, with all force and over great speed, ran with their rapiers one at the other, & were both slain. Now when two of the contrary opinion shall meet and fight, you shall see very peaceable wars between them. For they verily think that he that first thrusts is in great danger of his life, therefore with all speed do they put themselves in ward, or Stocata, the surest guard of all other, as Vincentio says, and thereupon they stand sure, saying the one to the other, "thrust if you dare", and says the other, "thrust if you dare", or "strike or thrust if you dare", says the other. Then says the other, "strike or thrust if you dare, for your life". These two cunning gentlemen standing long time together, upon this worthy ward, they both depart in peace, according to the old proverb: "It is good sleeping in a whole skin." Again if two shall fight, the one of opinion, that the warder has the advantage, then most commonly, the thruster being valiant, with all speed thrusts home, and by reason of the time and swift motion of his hand, they are most commonly with the points of their rapiers, or daggers, or both, one or both of them hurt or slain because their spaces of defence in this kind of fight,

are too wide in due time to defend, and the place being won, the eye of the patient by the swift motion of the agents hand is deceived. Another resolution they stand sure upon for their lives, to kill their enemies. in the which they are most commonly slain themselves: that is this: When they find the point of their enemy's rapier out of the right line, they say, they may boldly make home a thrust with a Passata, the which they observe, and do accordingly. But the other having a shorter time with his hand, as nature many times teaches him, suddenly turns his wrist, whereby he meets the other in his passage just with the point of his rapier in the face or body. And this false resolution has cost many a life.

**That the cause that many are so often slain, and many sore hurt in fight with long rapier is not by reason of their dangerous thrusts, nor cunning of that Italianated fight, but in the length and unwieldiness thereof.**

5

It is most certain, that men may with short swords both strike, thrust, false and double, by reason of their distance and nimbleness thereof, more dangerously than they can with long rapiers. And yet, when two fight with short swords, having true fight, there is no hurt done. Neither is it possible in any reason, that any hurt should be done between them of either side, and this is well known to all such as have the perfection of the true fight. By this it plainly appears, that the cause of the great slaughter, and sundry hurts done by long rapiers, consists not in their long reach, dangerous thrusts, nor cunningness of the Italian fight, but in the inconvenient length, and unwieldiness of their long rapiers, whereby it commonly falls out, that in all their actions appertaining to their defence, they are unable, in due time to perform, and continually in danger of every cross, that shall happen to be made with their rapier blades, which being done, within the half rapier; (unless both are of one mind with all speed to depart, which seldom or never happens between men of valiant disposition,) it is impossible to uncross, or get out, or avoid the stabs of the daggers. And this has fallen(?) out many times among valiant men at those weapons.

**Of running and standing safe in rapier fight, the runner has the advantage.**

6

If two valiant men fight being both cunning in running, & that they both use the same at one instant, their course is doubled, the place is won of both sides, and one or both of them will commonly be slain or sore hurt. And if one of them shall run, and the other stand fast upon the Imbrocata or Stocata, or however, the place will be at one instant won of one side, and gained of the other, and one or both of them will be hurt or slain. If both shall press hard upon the guard, he that first thrusts home in true place, hurts the other, & if both thrust together, they are both hurt. Yet some advantage the runner has, because he is an uncertain mark, and in his motion. The other is a certain mark, and in dead motion, And by reason of this many times the unskillful man takes advantage he knows not how, against him that lies watching upon his ward or Stocata guard.

**Of striking and thrusting both together.**

7



It is strongly held by many, that if in a fight they find their enemy to have more skill than themselves, they presently will continually strike & thrust just with him, whereby they will make their fight as good as his, and thereby have as good advantage as the other with all his skill. But if their swords be longer than the other, then their advantage is great. For it is certain (say they) that an inch will kill a man. But if their swords be much longer than the other, then their advantage is so great, that they will be sure by striking and thrusting just with the other, that they will always hurt him that has the short sword, and go clear themselves, because they will reach him, when he shall not reach them. These men speak like such as talk of Robin Hood, that never shot with his bow, for to strike or thrust just together with a man of skill, lies not in the will of the ignorant, because a skillful man always fights upon the true times, by which the unskillful is still disappointed of both place and time, and therefore driven of necessity still to watch the other, when & what he will do. That is, whether he will strike, thrust, or false. If the unskillful strike or thrust in the time of falsing, therein he neither strikes or thrusts just with the other. He may say, he has struck or thrust before him, but not just with him, not to any good purpose. For in the time of falsing, if he strikes or thrusts, he strikes or thrusts too short. For in that time he has neither time nor place to strike home, and as it is said, the unskillful man, that will take upon him to strike or thrust just with the skillful, must first behold what the man of skill will do, and when he will do it, and therefore of necessity is driven to suffer the skillful man to be the first mover, and entered into his action, whether it is blow or thrust. The truth of this cannot be denied. Now judge whether it is possible for an unskillful man to strike or thrust just together with a man of skill. But the skillful man can most certainly strike and thrust just with the unskillful, because the unskillful fights upon false times, which being too long to answer the true times, the skillful fighting upon the true times, although the unskillful is the first mover, & entered into his action, whether it is blow or thrust, yet the shortness of the true times make at the pleasure of the skillful a just meeting together. In the perfect fight two never strike or thrust together, because they never suffer place nor time to perform it.

Two unskillful men many times by chance strike or thrust together, chance unto them, because they know not what they do, or how it comes to pass. But the reasons or causes are these. Sometimes two false times meet & make a just time together, & sometimes a true time and a false time meet and make a just time together, and sometimes two true times meet and make a just time together. And all this happens because the true time and place is unknown unto them.

## **George Silver his resolution upon that hidden or doubtful question, who has the advantage of the Offender or Defender.**

8

The advantage is strongly held by many to be in the offender, yea insomuch, that if two minding to offend in their fight, it is thought to be in him that first strikes or thrusts. Others strongly hold opinion that the warder absolutely has still the advantage, but these opinions as they are contrary the one to the other, so are they contrary to true fight, as may well be seen by these short examples. If the advantage be in the warder, than it is not good any time to strike or thrust: if the advantage is in the striker or thruster, then were it a frivolous thing to learn to ward, or at any time to seek to ward, since in warding lies disadvantage. Now may it plainly by these examples appear, that if there is any perfection in fight, that both sides are deceived of their opinions, because if the striker or thruster has the advantage, then is the warder still in danger of wounds or death. If again, if the warder has the advantage, then is the striker or thrust in as great danger to defend himself against the warder, because the warder from his wards, takes advantage of the striker or thruster upon every blow or thrust, that shall be made against him. Then thus do I conclude, that if there is perfection in the Science of Defence, they are all in their opinions deceived. And that the truth may appear for the satisfaction of all men, this is my resolution: that there is no

advantage absolutely, nor disadvantage in striker, thruster, or warder, and their is great advantage in the striker, thruster & warder, but in this manner. In the perfection of fight the advantage consists in fight between party and party, that is, whosoever wins or gains the place in true pace, space and time, has the advantage, whether he is striker, thruster or warder. And that is my resolution.

## Of Spanish fight with the Rapier.

9

The Spaniard is now thought to be a better man with his rapier than is the Italian, Frenchman, high Almaine (German -- ST) or any other country man whatsoever, because they in their rapier-fight stand upon so many intricate tricks that in all the course of a man's life it shall be hard to learn them, and if they miss in doing the least of them in their fight, they are in danger of death. But the Spaniard in his fight, both safely to defend himself, and to endanger his enemy, has but one lying, and two wards to learn, wherein a man with small practice in a very short time may become perfect.

This is the manner of the Spanish fight. They stand as brave as they can with their bodies straight upright, narrow spaced, with their feet continually moving, as if they were in a dance, holding forth their arms and rapiers very straight against the face or bodies of their enemies, and this is the only lying to accomplish that kind of fight. And this note, that as long as any man shall lie in that manner with his arm, and the point of his rapier straight, it shall be impossible for his adversary to hurt him, because in that straight holding forth of his arm, which way soever a blow shall be made against him, by reason that his rapier hilt lies so far before him, he has but a very little way to move, to make his ward perfect, in this manner. If a blow is made at the right side of the head, a very little moving of the hand with the knuckles upward defends that side of the head or body, and the point being still out straight, greatly endangers the striker. And so likewise, if a blow is made at the left side of the head, a very small turning of the wrist with the knuckles downward, defends that side of the head and body, and the point of rapier much endangers the hand, arm, face or body of the striker. And if any thrust is made, the wards, by reason of the indirections in moving the feet in manner of dancing, as aforesaid, makes a perfect ward, and still withal the point greatly endangers the other. And thus is the Spanish fight perfect: so long as you can keep that order, and soon learned, and therefore to be accounted the best fight with the rapier of all other. But note how the Spanish fight is perfect, and you shall see no longer than you can keep your point straight against your adversary: as for example, I have heard the like jest.

There was a cunning Doctor at his first going to sea, being doubtful that he should be sea sick, an old woman perceiving the same, said unto him: "Sir, I pray, be of good comfort, I will teach you a trick to avoid that doubt. Here is a fine pebble stone, if you please to accept it, take it with you, and when you are on ship board, put it in your mouth, and as long you shall keep the same in your mouth, upon my credit you shall never vomit." The Doctor believed her, and took it thankfully at her hands, and when he was at sea, he began to be sick, whereupon he presently put the stone in his mouth, & there kept it so long as he possibly could, but through his extreme sickness the stone with vomit was cast out of his mouth. Then presently he remembered how the woman had mocked him, and yet her words were true.

Even so a Spaniard having his rapier point put by, may receive a blow on the head, or a cut over the face, hand or arm or a thrust in the body or face, and yet his Spanish fight perfect, so long as he can keep straight the point of his rapier against the face or body of his adversary, which is as easy in that manner of fight to be done, as it was for the Doctor in the extremity of his vomit to keep the stone in his mouth.

Yet one other pretty jest more, scarce worth the reading, in commendation of outlandish fight. There was an Italian teacher of Defence in my time, who so excellent in his fight, that he would hit any English man

with a thrust, just upon any button in his doublet, and this was much spoken of.

Also there was another cunning man in catching of wild-geese, he would have made no more ado, when he had heard them cry, as the manner of wild-geese is, flying one after another in rows, but presently looking up, would tell them, if there had been a dozen, sixteen, twenty, or more, he would have taken every one. And this tale was many times told by men of good credit, and much marvelled at by their hearers, and the man who would have taken the wild-geese, was of good credit himself. Merry they said, indeed he did never take any, but at any time when he looked up, and seen them fly in that manner, he would with all his heart have taken them, but he could no more tell how to do it, then could the cunning Italian Fencer tell how to hit an Englishman, with a thrust just upon any one of his buttons, when he listed.

## **Illusions for the maintenance of imperfect weapons & false fights, to fear or discourage the unskillful in their weapons, from taking a true course or use, for attaining to the perfect knowledge of true fight.**

10

First, for the rapier (says the Italian, or false teacher) I hold to be a perfect good weapon, because the cross hinders not to hold the handle in the hand, to thrust both far & straight, & to use all manner of advantages in the wards, or suddenly to call the same at the adversary, but with the sword you are driven with all the strength of the hand to hold fast the handle. And in the wars I would wish no friend of mine to wear swords with hilts, because when they are suddenly set upon, for haste they set their hands upon their hilts instead of their handles, in which time it happens many times before they can draw their swords, they are slain by their enemies(7). And for Sword and Buckler fight, it is imperfect, because the buckler blinds the fight, neither would I have any man lie aloft with his hand above his head, to strike sound blows. Strong blows are naught, especially being set above the head, because therein all the face and body are discovered. Yet I confess, in old times, when blows were only used with short Swords & Bucklers, & back Swords, these kinds of fights were good & most manly, now a days fight is altered. Rapiers are longer for advantage than swords were wont to be. When blows were used, men were so simple in their fight, that they thought him a coward, that would make a thrust or a blow beneath the girdle(8). Again if their weapons were short, as in times past they were, yet fight is better looked into these days, than then it was. Who is it in these days sees not that the blow compasses round like a wheel, whereby it has a long way to go, but the thrust passes in a straight line, and therefore comes a nearer way, and done in a shorter time than is the blow, and is more deadly than is the blow? There fore there is no wise man that will strike, unless he is weary of his life. It is certain, that the point for advantage every way in fight is to be used, the blow is utterly naught, and not to be used. He that fights upon the blow especially with a short sword, will be sore hurt or slain. The devil can say no more for the maintenance of errors.

## **That a blow comes continually as near as a thrust, and most commonly nearer, stronger, more swift, and is sooner done.**

11

The blow, by reason that it compasses round like a wheel, whereby it has a longer way to come, as the Italian Fencer says, & that the thrust passing in a straight line, comes a nearer way, and therefore is sooner done than a blow, is not true, these are the proofs(9).

Let two lie in their perfect strengths and readiness, wherein the blades of their rapiers by the motion of the body, may not be crossed of either side, the one to strike, and the other to thrust. Then measure the distance or course wherein the hand and hilt passes to finish the blow of the one, and the thrust of the other, and you shall find them both by measure, in distance all one. At let any man of judgement being seen in the exercise of weapons, not being more addicted unto novelties of fight, than unto truth itself, put in measure, and practice these three fights, variable, open, and guardant, and he shall see, that whenever any man lies at the thrust at the variable fight, (where of necessity most commonly he lies, or otherwise not possible to keep his rapier from crossing at the blow & thrust, upon the open or guardant fight,) that the blows & thrusts from these two fighters, come a nearer way, and a more stronger and swifter course than does the thrust, out of the variable fight. And thus for a general rule, wheresoever the thruster lies, or out of what fight soever he fights, with his rapier, or rapier and dagger, the blow in his course comes as near, and nearer, and more swift and stronger than does the thrust.

## **Perfect fight stands upon both blow and thrust, therefore the thrust is not only to be used.**

12

That there is no fight perfect without both blow and thrust: neither is there any certain rule to be set down for the use of the point only(10), these are the reasons: In fight there are many motions, with the hand, body, and feet, and in every motion the place of the hand is altered, & because by the motions of the hand, the altering of the places of the hand, the changes of lyings, wards, and breaking of thrusts, the hand will sometimes be in place to strike, some times to thrust, sometimes after a blow to thrust, sometimes after a thrust to strike, & sometimes in a place where you may strike, and cannot thrust without loss of time, and sometimes in place where you may thrust, and cannot strike without loss of time, and sometimes in a place where you can neither strike nor thrust, unless you fight upon both blow and thrust, nor able to defend yourself by ward or going back, because your space will be too wide, and your distance lost. And sometimes when you have made a thrust, a ward or breaking is taken in such sort with the dagger or blade of the sword, that you can neither thrust again, nor defend yourself unless you do strike, which you may soundly do, and go free, and sometimes when you strike, a ward will be taken in such sort, that you cannot strike again, nor defend yourself, unless you thrust, which you may safely do and go free. So to conclude, there is no perfection in the true fight, without both blow and thrust, nor certain rule to be set down for the point only.

## **That the blow is more dangerous and deadly in fight than a thrust, for proof thereof to be made according with Art, and Englishman holds argument against an Italian.**

13

Italian: Which is more dangerous or deadly in fight of a blow or a thrust?

Englishman: This question is not propounded according to art, because there is no fight perfect without both blow and thrust.

Italian: Let it be so, yet opinions are otherwise held, that the thrust is only to be used, because it comes a near way, and is more dangerous and deadly, for these reasons: first, the blow compasses round like a wheel, but the thrust passes in a straight line, therefore the blow by reason of this compass has a longer

way to go than the thrust & is therefore longer in doing, but the thrust passes in a straight line, therefore has a shorter way to go than has the blow, & is therefore done in a shorter time, & is therefore much better than the blow, & more dangerous and deadly, because if a thrust does hit the face or body, it endangers life, and most commonly death ensues, but if the blow hits the body, it is not so dangerous.

Englishman: Let your opinions be what they will, but that the thrust comes a nearer way, & is sooner done than the blow, is not true, and for proof thereof read the twelfth paradox. And now will I set down possible reasons, that the blow is better than the thrust, and more dangerous and deadly(11). First, the blow comes as near a way, & most commonly nearer than does the thrust, & is therefore done in a shorter time than is the thrust. Therefore in respect of time, whereupon stands the perfection of fight, the blow is much better than the thrust. Again, the force of the thrust passes straight, therefore any cross being indirectly made, the force of a child may put it by. But the force of the blow passes indirectly, therefore must be directly warded in the countercheck of his force, which cannot be done but by the convenient strength of a man, & with true cross in true time, or else will not safely defend him, and is therefor much better, & more dangerous than the thrust. And again, the thrust being made through the hand, arm, or leg, or in many places of the body and face, are not deadly, neither are they maims, or loss of limbs or life, neither is he much hindered for the time in his fight, as long as the blood is hot: for example:

I have known a gentleman hurt in rapier fight, in nine or ten places through the body, arms, and legs, and yet has continued in his fight, & afterward has slain the other, and come home and has been cured of all his wounds without maim, & is yet living. But the blow being strongly made, takes sometimes clean away the hand from the arm, has many times been seen(12). Again, a full blow upon the head or face with a short sharp sword, is most commonly death. A full blow upon the neck, shoulder, arm, or leg, endangers life, cuts off the veins, muscles, and sinews, perishes the bones: these wounds made by the blow, in respect of perfect healing, are the loss of limbs, or maims incurable forever.

And yet more for the blow: a full blow upon the head, face, arm, leg, or legs, is death, or the party so wounded in the mercy of him that shall so wound him. For what man shall be able long in fight to stand up, either to revenge, or defend himself, having the veins, muscles, sinews of his hand, arm, or leg clean cut asunder? Or being dismembered by such wound upon the face or head, but shall be enforced thereby, and through the loss of blood, the other a little dallying with him, to yield himself, or leave his life in his mercy?(13)

And for plainer deciding this controversy between the blow and the thrust, consider this short note. The blow comes many ways, the thrust does not so. The blow comes a nearer way than the thrust most commonly, and is therefore sooner done. The blow requires the strength of a man to be warded, but the thrust may be put by by the force of a child. A blow upon the hand, arm, or leg is maim incurable, but a thrust in the hand, arm, or leg is to be recovered. The blow has many parts to wound, and in every of them commands the life, but the thrust has but a few, as the body or face, and not in every part of them either.

**Of the difference between the true fight & the false. Wherein consists (the Principles being had with the direction of the four Governors) the whole perfection of fight with all manner of weapons.**

The true fights be these: whatsoever is done with the hand before the foot or feet is true fight. The false fights are these: whatsoever is done with the foot or feet before the hand, is false, because the hand is

swifter than the foot, the foot or feet being the slower mover than the hand, the hand in that manner of fight is tied to the time of the foot or feet, and being tied thereto, has lost his freedom, and is made thereby as slow in his motions as the foot or feet, and therefor that fight is false.

## **Of evil orders or customs in our English Fence schools, & of the old or ancient teaching of weapons, & things very necessary to be continued for the avoiding of errors, and reviving and continuance of our ancient weapons, and most victorious fight again.**

15

There is in my opinion in our fence schools an evil order or custom in these days used, the which, if it might stand with the liking of our Masters of Defence, I think it necessary to be left. For as long as it is used, it shall be hard to make a good scholar. That is this, at the single sword, sword and dagger, & sword and buckler, they forbid the thrust, & at the single rapier, and rapier & dagger, they forbid the blow. Either they are both together best, or the thrust altogether best, or the blow altogether best. If the thrust is best, why do we not use it at the single sword, sword & dagger, & sword & buckler? If the blow is best, why do we not use it at the single rapier, rapier & poniard? But knowing by the art of arms, that no fight is perfect without both blow and thrust, why do we not use and teach both blow and thrust? But however this we daily see, that when two met in fight, whether they have skill or none, unless such as have tied themselves to that boyish, Italian, weak, imperfect fight, they both strike and thrust, and how shall he then do, that being much taught in school, that never learned to strike, nor how to defend a strong blow? And how shall he then do, that being brought up in a fencing school, that never learned to thrust with the single sword, sword and dagger, and sword and buckler, nor how at these weapons to break a thrust? Surely, I think a down right fellow, that never came in school, using such skill as nature yielded out of his courage, strength, and agility, with good downright blows and thrust among, as shall best frame in his hands, should put one of these imperfect scholars greatly to his shifts. Besides, there are now in these days no grips, closes, wrestlings, striking with the hilts, daggers, or bucklers, used in fencing schools. Our plowmen will by nature will do these things with great strength & agility. But the schoolmen is altogether unacquainted with these things. He being fast tied to such school-play as he has learned, has lost thereby the benefit of nature, and the plowman is now by nature without art a far better man than he. Therefore in my opinion as long as we bar any manner of play in school, we shall hardly make a good scholar. There is no manner of teaching comparable to the old ancient teaching, that is, first their quarters, then their wards, blows, thrusts, and breaking of thrusts, then their closes and grips, striking with the hilts, daggers, bucklers, wrestlings, striking with the foot or knee in the cods, and all these are safely defended in learning perfectly of the grips(14). And this is the ancient teaching, and without this teaching, there shall never scholar be made able, do his uttermost, nor fight safe. Again their swords in schools are too long by almost half a foot to uncross, without going back with the feet, within distance or perfectly to strike or thrust within the half or quarter sword. And in serving of the prince, when men do meet together in public fight, are utterly naught and unserviceable. The best length for perfect teaching of the true fight to be used and continued in fence schools, to accord with the true statures of all men, are these. The blade to be a yard and an inch for men of mean stature, and for men of tall statures, a yard and three or four inches, and no more(15). And I would have the rapier continued in schools, always ready for such as shall think themselves cunning, or shall have delight to play with that imperfect weapon. Provided always, that the schoolmaster or usher play with him with his short sword, plying him with all manner of fight according to the true art. This being continued the truth shall flourish, the lie shall be beaten down, and all nations not having the true science, shall come with all gladness to the valiant and most brave English masters of defence to learn the true fight for their defence.

## **The grounds or Principles of true fight with all manner of weapons.**

16

First judgement, lyings, distance, direction, pace, space, place, time, indirection, motion, action, general and continual motion, progression, regression, traversing, and treading of ground, blows, thrusts, falses, doubles, slips, wards, breaking of thrusts, closings, grips, & wrestlings, guardant fight, open fight, variable fight, and close fight, and four governors.

## **The wards of all manner of weapons.**

17

All single weapons have four wards, and all double weapons have eight wards. The single sword has two with the point up, and two with the point down. The staff and all manner of weapons to be used with two hands have the like.

The sword and buckler, and the sword and dagger are double weapons, and have eight wards, two with the point up, and two with the point down, and two for the legs with the point down, the point to be carried for both sides of the legs, with the knuckles downward, and two wards with the dagger or buckler for the head. The forest bill is a double weapon by reason of the head, and therefore has eight wards, four with the staff, four with the head, four of them to be used as with the staff, and the other four with the head, the one up, the other down, and the other sideways.

## **The names and numbers of times appertaining unto fight both true and false.**

18

There are eight times, whereof four are true, and four are false. The true times are these. The time of the hand.

The time of the hand and body.

The time of the hand, body, and foot.

The time of the hand, body, and feet.

The false times are these.

The time of the foot.

the time of the foot and body.

the time of the foot, body, and hand.

the time of the feet, body, and hand.

Thus have I thought good to separate and make known the true times from the false, with the true wards thereto belonging, that thereby the rather in practicing of weapons a true course may be taken for the avoiding of errors and evil customs, and speedy attaining of good habit or perfect being in the true use and knowledge of all manner of weapons.

## **Of the length of weapons, and how every man may fit himself to**

# the perfect length of his weapon, according to his own stature, with brief reasons wherefore they ought to be so.

19

To know the perfect length of your sword, you shall stand with your sword and dagger drawn, as you see this picture, keeping out straight your dagger arm, drawing back your sword as far as conveniently you can, not opening the elbow joint of your sword arm, and look what you can draw within your dagger, that is the just length of your sword, to be made according to your own stature.(16)

28  
19 **O** know the perfect length of your Sword,  
you shall stand with your sword and dagger  
drawn, as you see this picture, keeping out  
straight your dagger arme, drawing backe  
your sword as far as conveniently you can, not opening  
the elbow ioynt of your sword arme: and looke what you  
can draw within your dagger, that is the iust length of  
your sword, to be made according to your owne stature.

*If the sword be  
longer, you can  
hardly withdrawe  
without going  
backe with your  
feet. If shorter,  
tho you can hardly  
by make a true  
crosse without  
putting in of your  
feet, the which  
times are too long  
to answer the  
size of the hand.*

*It is like reason  
for the short  
staffe, half pike,  
forest bill, Part-  
isan, or Gleeve, or  
such like weapons  
of perfect length.*



As I have here made a figurative demonstration, to know the perfect length of the sword, as afore is said, so have I in the page following, for the plainer understanding of the reader, set forth a form of standing, to know the lengths of the short staff, half pike, forest bill, partisan, and gleve, or such like weapons of advantage, as shall also best fit the statures of all men.





The perfect length of your two handed sword is, the blade to be the length of the blade of your single sword.

To know the perfect length of your short staff, or half pike, forest bill, partisan, or glaive, or such like weapons of vantage and perfect lengths, you shall stand upright, holding the staff upright close by your body, with your left hand, reaching with your right hand your staff as high as you can, and then allow to that length a space to set both your hands, when you come to fight, wherein you may conveniently strike, thrust, and ward, & that is the just length to be made according to your stature. And this note, that these lengths will commonly fall out to be eight or nine foot long, and will fit, although not just, the statures of all men without any hindrance at all unto them in their fight, because in any weapon wherein the hands may be removed, and at liberty, to make the weapon longer or shorter in fight at his pleasure, a foot of the staff being behind the backmost hand does no harm. And wherefore these weapons ought to be of the lengths aforesaid, and no shorter, these are the reasons: If they should be shorter, then the long staff, morris pike, and such like weapons over and above the perfect length, should have great advantage over them, because he may come boldly and safe without any guard or ward, to the place where he may thrust home, and at every thrust put him in danger of his life, then can the long staff, the morris pike, or any longer weapon lie nowhere within the compass of the true cross, to cross and uncross, whereby he may safely pass home to the place, where he may strike or thrust him that has the long weapon, in the head, face, or body at his pleasure.

**Of the lengths of the battle axe, halberd, or black bill, or such like**

## **weapons of weight, appertaining unto guard or battle.**

20

In any of these weapons there needs no just length, but commonly they are, or ought to be five or six foot long, & may not well be used much longer, because of their weights, and being weapons for the wars and battle, when men are joined close together, may thrust, & strike sound blows, with great force both strong and quick. And finally for the just lengths of all other shorter or longer weapons to be governed with both hands, there is none. Neither is there any certain lengths in any manner of weapons to be used with one hand, over or under the just length of the single sword. Thus ends the length of weapons.

## **Of the vantages of weapons in their kinds, places, & times, both in private and public fight.**

21

First I will begin with the worst weapon, an imperfect and insufficient weapon, and not worth the speaking of, but now being highly esteemed, therefore not to be unremembered. That is, the single rapier, and rapier and poniard.

The single sword has the vantage against the single rapier.

The sword and dagger has the vantage against the rapier and poniard.

The sword & target has the advantage against the sword and dagger, or the rapier and poniard.

The sword and buckler has advantage against the sword and target, the sword and dagger, or rapier and poniard.

The two handed sword has the vantage against the sword and target, the sword and buckler, the sword and dagger, or rapier and poniard.

The battle axe, the halberd, the black-bill, or such like weapons of weight, appertaining unto guard or battle, are all one in fight, and have advantage against the two handed sword, the sword and buckler, the sword and target, the sword and dagger, or the rapier and poniard.

The short staff or half pike, forest bill, partisan, or glaive, or such like weapons of perfect length, have the advantage against the battle axe, the halberd, the black bill, the two handed sword, the sword and target, and are too hard for two swords and daggers, or two rapier and poniards with gauntlets, and for the long staff and morris pike.

The long staff, morris pike, or javelin, or such like weapons above the perfect length, have advantage against all manner of weapons, the short staff, the Welch hook, partisan, or glaive, or such like weapons of vantage excepted, yet are too weak for two swords and daggers or two sword and bucklers, or two rapiers and poniards with gauntlets, because they are too long to thrust, strike, and turn speedily. And by reason of the large distance, one of the sword and dagger-men will get behind him.

The Welch hook or forest bill, has advantage against all manner of weapons whatsoever.

Yet understand, that in battles, and where variety of weapons are, among multitudes of men and horses, the sword and target, the two handed sword, battle axe, the black bill, and halberd, are better weapons, and

more dangerous in their offense and forces, than is the sword and buckler, short staff, long staff, or forest bill. The sword and target leads upon shot, and in troops defends thrusts and blows given by battle axe, halberds, black bill, or two handed swords, far better than can the sword and buckler.

The morris pike defends the battle from both horse and man, much better than can the short staff, long staff, or forest bill. Again the battle axe, the halberd, the black bill, the two handed sword, and sword & target, among armed men and troops, by reason of their weights, shortness, and great force, do much more offend the enemy, & are then much better weapons, than is the short staff, the long staff, or the forest bill.

## **Of the insufficiency and disadvantages of the rapiers-fight in battle.**

22

For the single rapier, or rapier & poniard, they are imperfect & insufficient weapons: and especially in service of the prince, when men shall join together, what service can soldier do with a rapier, a childish toy wherewith a man can do nothing but thrust, nor that neither, by reason of the length, and in every moving when blows are a dealing, for lack of a hilt is in danger to have his hand or arm cut off, or his head cloven. And for wards and grips, they have none, neither can any of these fine rapier men, for lack of use, tell how to strike a sound blow.

## **Of the vantages and sufficiency of the short sword fight in battle.**

23

The short sword, and sword and dagger, are perfect good weapons, and especially in service of the prince. What a brave weapon is a short sharp light sword, to carry, to draw, to be nimble withal, to strike, to cut, to thrust both strong and quick. And what a good defence is a strong single hilt, when men are clustering and hurling together, especially where variety of weapons are, in their motions to defend the hand, head, face, and bodies, from blows, that shall be given sometimes with swords, sometimes with two handed swords, battle axes, halberds, or black bills, and sometimes men shall be so near together, they shall have no space, scarce to use the blades of their swords below their waist, then their hilts (their hands being aloft) defend from the blows their hands, arms, heads, faces and bodies. Then they lay on, having the use of blows and grips, by force of their arms with their hilts, strong blows, at the head, face, arms, bodies, and shoulders, and many times hurling together, scope is given to turn down their points, with violent thrusts at the faces and bodies, by reason of the shortness of their blades, to the mighty annoyance, discomfort, and great destruction of their enemies. One valiant man with a sword in his hand, will do better service, than ten Italians, or Italianated with their rapiers.

**That all manner of double weapons, or weapons to be used with both hands, have advantage against the single rapier or single sword, there is no question to be made.**

**That the sword and buckler has the vantage against the sword and dagger.**

The dagger is an imperfect ward, although borne out straight, to make the space narrow, whereby a little moving of the hand, may be sufficient to save both sides of the head, or to break the thrust from the face or body, yet for lack of the circumference his hand will lie too high or low, or too weak, to defend both blow and thrust. If he lies straight with a narrow space, which is to break the thrust, then he lies too weak, and too low to defend his head from a strong blow. If he lies high, that is strong to defend his head, but then his space will be too wide to break the thrust from his body. The dagger serves well at length to put by a thrust, and at the half sword to cross the sword blade, to drive out the agent, and put him in danger of his life, and safely in any of these two actions defend himself. But the buckler, by reason of his circumference and weight, being well carried, defends safely in all times and places, whether it be at the point, half sword, the head, body, and face, from all manner of blows and thrusts whatsoever, yet I have heard many hold opinion, that the sword and dagger has the advantage of the sword and buckler, at the close, by reason of the length and point of the dagger, and at the point of the sword, they can better see to ward than with a buckler. But I never knew any, that won the close with the dagger upon the sword and buckler, but did with himself out again: for distance being broken, judgement fails, for lack of time to judge, and the eye is deceived by the swift motion of the hand, and for lack of true space with the dagger hand, which cannot be otherwise, for lack of circumference to defend both blow and thrust, it is impossible for lack of true space in just time, the agent having gotten the true place, to defend one thrust or blow of a hundred. And it is most certain, whosoever closes with sword and dagger against the sword and buckler, is in great danger to be slain. Likewise at the point within distance, if he stand to defend both blow and thrust with his dagger, for lack of true space and distance, if he has the best eye of any man, and could see perfectly, which way the thrust or blow comes, and when it comes, as it is not to deny that he may, yet his space being too large, it helps him nothing, because one man's hand being as swift as another man's hand, both being within distance, he that strikes or thrusts, hurts the warder. The reason is this: the agent being in the first motion although in his offense, further to go than the warder to defend, yet the warder's space being too large, the blow or thrust will be performed home, before the warder can come to the true place to defend himself, and although the warder does perfectly see the blow or thrust coming, so shall he see his own ward so far from the true place of his defence, that although he does at that instant time, plainly see the blow or thrust coming, it shall be impossible for him to recover the true place of his ward, 'til he his wounded. But let the warder with his dagger say, that it is not true which I have said, for the eyes to behold the blow or thrust coming, so has he as good time to defend himself. Herein he shall find himself deceived to, this is the reason: the hand is the swiftest motion, the foot is the slowest, without distance the hand is tied to the motion of the feet, whereby the time of the hand is made as slow as the foot, because whereby we redeem every time lost upon his coming in by the slow motion of the foot & have time thereby to judge, when & how he can perform any action whatsoever, and so have we the time of the hand to the time of the feet. Now is the hand in his own course more swift than the foot or eye, therefore within distance the eye is deceived, & judgement is lost, and that is another cause that the warder with the dagger, although he has perfect eyes, is still within distance deceived(17). For proof that the hand is swifter than the eye & therefore deceives the eyes: let two stand within distance, & let one of them stand still to defend himself, & let the other flourish & false with his hand, and he shall continually with the swift motions of his hand, deceive the eyes of him that stands watching to defend himself, & shall continually strike him in diverse places with his hand. Again, take this for an example, that the eyes by swift motions are deceived: turn a turn-wheel swift, & you shall not be able to discern with your best eyes how many spokes are on the wheel, no nor whether there are any spokes at all, or whereof the wheel is made, and yet you see when the wheel stands still there is a large distance between every spoke. He that will not believe that the swift motion of the hand in fight will deceive the eye, shall stare abroad with his eyes, & feel himself soundly hurt, before he shall perfectly see how to defend himself. So those that trust to their fight, the excellency of a good eye, their great cunning, & perfect wards of the daggers, that they can see better to ward than with a buckler, shall ever be deceived. And when they are wounded, they say

the gent was a little too quick for them. Sometimes they say they bear their dagger a little too low. Sometimes they are thrust under the dagger, then they say, they bear it a little too high. Sometimes a thrust being strongly made, they being soundly paid therewith, say, they were a little too slow, & sometimes they be soundly paid with a thrust, & they think they were a little too quick. So they that practice or think to be cunning in the dagger ward, are all the days of their lives learning, and are never taught(18).

## **That the sword and buckler has the vantage against the sword and target.**

25

The sword & target together has but two fights, that is the variable fight, & the close fight, for the close fight, the number of his feet are too many to take against any man of skill having the sword & buckler, & for the variable fight although not so many in number, yet too many to win the place with his foot and strike home. The sword & buckler man out of his variable, open & guardant fight can come bravely off & on, false & double, strike & thrust home, & make a true cross upon every occasion at his pleasure. If the sword & target man will fly to his guardant fight, the breadth of the target will not suffer it, if to his open fight, then has the sword & buckler man in effect the sword and buckler to the single, for in that fight by reason of the breadth, the target can do little good or none at all.

## **The short staff.**

26

Now for the vantage of the short staff against the sword and buckler, sword & target, two handed sword, single sword, sword and dagger, or rapier and poniard, there is no great question to be in any of these weapons. Whensoever any blow or thrust shall be strongly made with the staff, they are ever in false place, in the carriage of the wards, for if at any of these six weapons he carries his ward high & strong for his head, as of necessity he must carry it very high, otherwise it will be too weak to defend a blow being strongly made at the head, then will his space be too wide, in due time to break the thrust from his body. Again, if he carries his ward lower, thereby to be in equal space for readiness to break both blow & thrust, then in that place his ward is too low, and too weak to defend the blow of the staff: for the blow being strongly made at the head upon that ward, will beat down the ward and his head together, and put him in great danger of his life. And here is to be noted, that if he fights well, the staff man strikes but at the head, and thrusts presently under at the body. And if a blow is first made, a thrust follows, and if a thrust is first made, a blow follows, and in doing of any of them, the one breeds the other. So that however any of these six weapons shall carry his ward strongly to defend the first, he shall be too far in space to defend the second, whether it be blow or thrust.

Yet again for the short staff: the short staff has the vantage against the battle axe, black bill, or halberd: the short staff has the advantage, by reason of the nimbleness and length: he will strike and thrust freely, and in better and swifter time than can the battle axe, black bill, or halberd, and by reason of his judgement, distance and time, fight safe. And this resolve upon, the short staff is the best weapon against all manner of weapons, the forest bill excepted.

Also the short staff has advantage against two swords and daggers, or two rapiers, poniards and gauntlets(19), the reasons and causes before are for the most part set down already, the which being well considered, you shall plainly see, that whensoever any one of the sword & dagger men, or rapier and poniard men shall break his distance, or suffer the staff man to break his, that man which did first break

his distance, or suffer the distance to be one against him, is presently in danger of death. And this cannot in reason be denied, because the distance appertaining to the staff man, either to keep or break, stands upon the moving of one large space always at the most, both for his offense or safety. The other two in the breach of their distance to offend the staff man, have always four paces at the least therein they fall too great in number with their feet, and too short in distance to offend the staff man. Now there rests no more to be spoken of, but how the staff man shall behave himself to keep that distance, that one of the sword & dagger men get not behind him, while the other shall busy him before. To do that is very easy, by reason of the small number of his feet, as it were in the center point of a wheel, the other two to keep their distance, are driven to run twenty feet for one, as it were upon the uttermost part of the circle of the wheel, all this while the staff man is very well. Then it comes thus to pass, whether they both labor to get behind him, or one keeps directly before him while the other gets behind him, yet before that is brought to pass, they shall either be both before him or just against both sides of him, at which time soever the staff man finding either within distance, he presently in making of his play, slays, with blow or thrust one of them, or at the least puts him in great danger of his life. If the staff man takes his time, when they are both before him, that is to say, before they come to the half ring, just against both sides of the staff man, then he that is nearest within distance is slain by blow or thrust, or put in great danger of his life. But if the sword and dagger men do keep their distance until they come to the just half ring against the sides of the staff man, and then break distance, that man that first breaks distance is slain with blow or thrust, or sore hurt, and in great danger of death, and the staff man in making that play at that instant, must turn with one large pace, which he may easily do, before the other can get near enough to offend him by reason that he has to make with his feet but one large pace, but the other has to make with his feet but one large pace, but the other has at the least three paces. But if the sword and dagger men will in the time they are before him, keep their distance in the time of their being upon the middle part of the outside of the circle, right against both sides of him, & will labor with all heed & diligence to be both or one of them behind him, that troubles the staff man nothing at all, for in that very time, when he finds them past the middle part of the circle, he presently turns, by the which he shall naturally set himself as it were in a triangle, and both the sword and dagger-men, shall thereby stand both before him in true distance of three paces, from offending of him at the least, as at the first they did. And take this for a true ground, there is no man able to ward a sound blow with the sword and dagger, nor rapier, poniard and gauntlet, being strongly made at the head, with the staff, and run in withal, the force of hands in such, being in his full motion and course, that although the other carries his ward high and strong with both hands, yet his feet being moving from the ground, the great force of the blow will strike him with his ward, and all down flat to ground. But if he stands fast with his feet, he may with both weapons together, strongly defend his head from the blow, but then you are sufficiently instructed, the thrust being presently made, after the blow full at the body, it is impossible in due time to break it, by reason of the largeness of his space.

## **The short staff has the vantage against the long staff, and Morris pike, and the Forest Bill against all manner of weapons.**

27

The reasons are these. The short staff has the vantage of the long staff and Morris pike in the strength & narrowness of space in his four wards of defence. And the Forest bill has the vantage of all manner of weapons in his strength and narrowness of space in his eight wards of defence. And the rather because the bill has two wards for one against the staff or Morris pike, that is to say, four with the staff, and four with the head, and is more offensive than is the staff or Morris pike. Yet a question(20) may be made by the unskillful, concerning the fight between the long staff and the short, in this sort: Why should not the long staff have advantage against the short staff, since that the long staff man, being at liberty with his hands, may make his staff both long and short for his best advantage, when he shall think it good, and therefore

when he shall find himself overmatched in the length of his staff, by the strength of the short staff, and narrowness of space of his four wards of defence, he can presently by drawing back of his staff in his hands, make his staff as short as the other's, and so be ready to fight him with at his own length? To this I answer(21), that when the long staff man is driven there to lie, the length of his staff that will lie behind him, will hinder him to strike, thrust, ward, or go back in due time. Neither can he turn the contrary end of his staff to keep out the short staff man from the close, nor safely to defend himself at his coming in.

## **Again of the vantages of weapons.**

28

Make this for a general rule, all long staves, Morris pikes, Forest bills, Javelins, or such like long weapons, of what sort soever, being above the true lengths, the shortest has the advantage, because they can cross and uncross in shorter time than can the longer. And all manner of short weapons to be used with both hands, as staves, and such like, being under the perfect lengths, the longest have the advantage, and all manner of weapons to be used with one hand, that are above the perfect length of the single sword, the shortest has the vantage, and all manner of weapons under the just length of the short sword, as falchions, skaines, or hangers, woodknives, daggers, and such like short weapons of imperfect lengths, the longest has the advantage, because the fight of these weapons consist within the half or quarter sword, wherein by the swift motions of their hands, their eyes are deceived, and in those weapons, commonly for their hands lie no defence. And if two shall fight with staves or swords, or what weapons soever, the one of them having his weapon longer than the perfect length, and the other shorter than the perfect length, he that has the longer has the vantage, because the shorter can make no true cross in true time. The short staff or half pike, Forest bill, Partisan, or glaive, or such like weapons of perfect length, to be used with both hands, have the advantage against two swords and daggers, or two rapiers, poniards and gauntlets, and against all other weapons whatsoever, the Forest bill excepted.

## **Again for the short staff or half pike.**

29

The short staff is most commonly the best weapon of all others, although other weapons may be more offensive, and especially against many weapons together, by reason of his nimbleness and swift motions, and is not much inferior to the Forest bill, although the Forest bill is more offensive, and has more wards, because the Staff is very uncertain, but the Bill is a more certain mark, by reason of the breadth of the head, whereby as the Bill has advantage in his wards in the head, so therefor has the staff the like defence, or rather more, to play upon the head of the bill, not only to make a perfect good ward, but thereby, the rather to cast the Bill out of the right line, whereby the staff man may thrust safe, and endanger the Bill-man: and the rather because therein he is the first mover, wherein there is great vantage, both in time and force. And if the Bilman is not very skillful (all vantages and disadvantages of both sides being considered,) the short Staff will prove the better weapon. Lastly note this(22), that long Staves, Morris pikes, and such like weapons of imperfect lengths, being to be used with both hands, notwithstanding their imperfect lengths, are perfect weapons to be used, the one against the other, and their fights therein perfect, because in drawing of them back betwixt their hands, their motion is swifter backwards, than is the time of the agents feet forwards, by which all their lost times are redeemed. Therefore these weapons in their fights, the one against the other are perfect. And these weapons in the night are the best weapons of all others, and have great advantage against the Forest bill, short staff, or any manner of short weapons whatsoever, for these causes: they boldly make home their fights, and if need be against desperate men, that will venture themselves to run in, they redeem their lost times. But the other with shorter weapons for

lack of light, can make no true defence. Thus ends the vantages of weapons.

## **Questions and answers between the scholar and the master, of the vantages and disadvantages between a tall man, and a man of mean stature, having both the perfect knowledge in their weapons.**

30

Scholar: Who has the advantage in fight, of a tall man, or a man of mean stature?

Master: The tall man has the vantage, for these causes(23): his reach being longer, and weapon unto his stature accordingly, he has thereby a shorter course with his feet to win the true place, wherein by the swift motion of his hand, he may strike or thrust home, in which time a man of mean stature cannot reach him, & by his large pace, in his true pace in his regression further, sets himself out of danger, & these are the vantages that a tall man has against any man of shorter reach than himself.

Scholar: What vantage has a man of mean stature against a tall man?

Master: He has none: because the true times in fight, and actions accordingly, are to be observed and done, as well by a tall man, as by a man of mean stature.

Scholar: Why then if this is true, that tall men have the vantage against men of mean stature, it should seem in fight there is no perfection, other then this, when men of like stature, reach, & length of weapon, shall fight together, the which will seldom or never happen, but either in the length of their weapons, statures or reaches (if their swords should be of just length) some difference most commonly will be in their reaches.

Master: Yes verily, the tall man has still the vantage, and yet the fight is perfect, although the men that shall happen to fight, shall happen to be unequal in their statures, reaches, or lengths of their weapons.

Scholar: That can I hardly believe, unless you can tell me by art how to avoid or safely defend my self, being but a man of mean stature, against a tall man.

Master: I will tell you. There belongs unto this art of defence only to be used with the feet, progression, regression, traversing, and treading of grounds. In any of these you playing the part of the patient, or patient agent, your feet are swifter in their motion than are the agents, because his weight and number of his feet in his coming in to win the place to strike or thrust home, are greater than yours, and therefore the true time is yours to avoid him, or safely to defend yourself. So the art is still true, and the tall man has still the vantage.

Scholar: Yet I am not fully satisfied herein, because you tell me still that the tall man has the vantage, and notwithstanding you say the art is true, wherein then has the tall man the vantage, when by your art you can defend yourself against him?

Master: I will satisfy you herein thus. The tall man has the vantage, he can maintain his fight, both by nature and by art, with more ease than can the man of mean stature, because the man of mean stature has thereby a further course with his feet to pass to the place, wherein he may strike or thrust home, and in winning of that place, is driven by art to come guarded under his wards to defend himself, because in the time of his coming, the tall man may have both naturally or artificially strike or thrust home, in which time, if the man of mean stature should fail in the least iota of his art, he should be in great danger of death



or hurt. But the tall man can naturally(24) and safely come to the true place open, without any artificial wards at all, and therein also endanger the other, or drive him still to traverse his ground, with all the artificial skill that he has to defend himself, and all this the tall man does by reason of his length of weapon, large pace, short course, and long reach, with great safety, pleasure and ease. And for those causes the tall man has still the vantage of men of mean stature, and not withstanding the noble science of defence most perfect and good.

## **Of the single rapier fight between valiant men, having both skill, he that is the best wrestler, or if neither of them can wrestle, the strongest man most commonly kills the other, or leaves him at his mercy.**

31

When two valiant men of skill at single rapier do fight, one or both of them most commonly standing upon their strength or skill in wrestling, will presently seek to run into the close. But having both skill, not without special care of their guard or cross, the which they may safely do, by reason of the length of the rapiers: but happening both of one mind, the rather do bring themselves together: that being done, no skill with rapiers avail, they presently grapple fast their hilts, their wrists, arms, bodies or necks, as in lustring(?), wrestling, or striving together, they may best find for their advantages: whereby it most commonly falls out, that he that is the best wrestler, or strongest man (if neither of them can wrestle) overcomes, wrestling by strength, or fine skill in wrestling, the rapier from his adversary, or casting him from him, either to the ground, or to such distance, that he may by reason thereof, use the edge or point of his rapier, to strike or thrust him, leaving him dead or alive at his mercy. But if one of these valiant men shall seek to run into the close, and the other shall use his skill in traversing of his ground, or otherwise by standing upon his guard or Stocata ward, to take all manner of advantages at his coming, yet all avails him not, because the rapiers being long, the crossing of the blades cannot be avoided. That being made, the oppressor runs faster forwards than can the the defendant backwards, and so are brought together, as in the first assault they were, & every action therein performed.

## **Of the rapier and poniard fight betwixt valiant men, having both skill.**

32

If two valiant men do fight at rapier and poniard having both skill, one or both of them will presently press hard to win the place, wherein in his judgement he may thrust home. If both are of one mind, the time is doubled in winning the same, whereby it comes to pass, that then he that first thrusts, endangers, kills or hurts the other, and if they both thrust together, as they may do by the equal time of their feet, then they are most commonly both slain, or both hurt. And this is well known unto all men of skill, that the place being once gotten, there is neither judgement, space, pace, nor time, either by wards with their rapier blades, or by breaking with their poniards, or flying back, that can preserve or defend them. But if but one of them will seek to win by passage, hard pressing, or otherwise the place, wherein in his judgement he may thrust home, it is impossible for the other to deny him the same, because the length of the rapiers wins him the cross. The cross being taken, the place is had. The place being had, he that first thrusts, first speeds: if both thrust together, they are both in dange: then presently follows (unless it please God otherwise to have it) the stabs with their daggers, wherein there lies no defence.

## **Of the long rapier & Poniard fight between two valiant men, the one having skill, the other none, he that has no skill has the vantage.**

33

When two valiant men shall fight with long rapiers and poniards, the one having skill, the other none, he that has no skill most commonly proves himself the better man, for these causes or reasons following. First the skillful man as knowing the other to have no skill, or find it to be so by his shape or manner of coming towards him, will presently yield to take the advantage of his coming, or else with all speed put himself into his short ward, to be ready at his coming to make a strong Stocata (as the Italians call it) the other knowing his imperfection in fight, assures himself there can be no great good for him to stand long out at the point, presently redoubles or revives his spirits with perfect resolution, to make short work, courageously with some offensive action, such as nature shall best yield unto him, flies in with all force and agility. The skillful man stands watching to take such advantage as his schoolmaster has taught him, in which time, many times it falls out, he is taught a new time, seen by an unskillful man that never fought before, is sore hurt or slain. And if it happens they both miss in their offensive actions, then by reason thereof, and of the imperfect length of their rapiers, they come to stabbing with their poniards, wherein their lies no defence, because distance being broken, judgement fails, time is lost, and their eyes (by the swift motions of their hands) are deceived.

## **Of the long single rapier, or rapier and poniard fight between two unskillful men being valiant.**

34

When two unskillful men (being valiant) shall fight with long single rapiers, there is less danger in that kind of fight, by reason of their distance in convenient length, weight, and unwieldiness, than is with short rapiers, whereby it comes to pass, that what hurt shall happen to be done, if any with the edge or point of their rapiers is done in a moment, and presently will grapple and wrestle together, wherein most commonly the strongest or best wrestler overcomes, and the like fight falls out between them, at the long rapier and poniard, but much more deadly, because instead of close and wrestling, they fall most commonly to stabbing with their poniards.

## **Of the imperfection and insufficiency of rapiers in general, of what length soever they are.**

35

If two fight with long rapiers, upon every cross made with the half rapier<sup>(25)</sup>, if they have poniards, they most commonly stab each other, which cannot be avoided, because the rapiers being long, the cross cannot be undone of either side, without going back with their feet, the which likewise in due time cannot be done, because the hand is more swift than the feet, and the feet more swift in their course forwards than backwards, neither can the cross be prevented, because the point of necessity lies too far off in his offense, or else within compass of the true time of the hand and body, by reason of his imperfect length, and so by the like reason, if two fight with long single rapiers, upon every cross made therewith, within the half rapier, the close cannot be avoided, whereby it comes to pass most commonly, that the strongest man or

best wrestler overcomes. Now if two do fight with short rapiers, or rapiers of convenient length, such rapiers are inconvenient also for lack of hilt to defend the hand and head from the blow. For no eye (in making a perfect ward for the head, to defend the blow, can discern to take the same within three or four inches, whereby it may as well and as often fall upon the hand, as upon the blade of the rapier. Again, the hilt as well serves to defend the head as the hand, and is a more sure and strong ward, than is the blade of the rapier. And further, understand this for truth, that in gardant and open fight, the hand without a hilt lies open to most blows that shall be struck by the agent, out of gardant or open fight, because in the true carriage of the gardant fight, the hand must lie above the head, in such straightness and narrowness of space, that which way soever the agent shall strike or thrust at the head, face, or body, the removing of two or four inches shall save all. And now somewhat more for the shortness or convenient length of rapiers.

Rapiers having no hilts to defend the head, the rapier man is driven of necessity to lie at the variable fight or low ward, and being there he can neither defend in due time, head, face nor body from the blows or thrusts of him, that shall fight out of the gardant or open fight, but is continually in great danger of the agent, for these causes following. First, because his space is too wide to defend his head from blow or thrust. Secondly his pace standing upon that fight, will be of necessity too great or too narrow. If too narrow, too weak, if too large, his weight and number of his feet, are too great to endanger him, that is upon his gardant or open fight.

## **Of the imperfection and insufficiency of the fight of the single rapier, rapier and poniard, rapier and buckler, rapier and cloak, and rapier and glove of mail.**

36

The rapier fight, whether it is single or accompanied with the poniard, buckler, cloak, or glove of mail, is still by reason of the insufficiency or imperfection of the rapier, an imperfect fight. Imperfect instruments can make no perfect music, neither can imperfect weapons make perfect fight. Let men that handle them have all the knowledge that may be in all manner of weapons, yes the full height, or perfection, and habit by his great labor and industry, even as it were naturally effected in him, yet if the weapons that they shall fight withal be imperfect or insufficient to perform whatsoever appertains unto true fight, as concerning the perfection of their safety, it avails them nothing. What shall we then say for the rapier? Is the rapier an imperfect or insufficient weapon to perform whatsoever appertains unto true fight? Yes. Wherefore? Because unto the true fight there appertains four fights, gardant fight, open fight, variable fight, and close fight, without all four of these fights it is impossible to fight safe. But the rapier for lack of a hilt is an imperfect weapon, and therefore insufficient to fight safe upon these four fights, for the are already set down in the Paradox before, but is inferred to loose the benefit of two of the best fights, gardant and open fight, and to fly from them, and trust only unto variable fight, and close fight. Now having proved through the imperfection or insufficiency of the rapier, the imperfections of the rapier fight, it remains that I speak of the rest of the weapons, or instruments appertaining unto rapier fight.

The rapier and poniard fight, the rapier & buckler fight, the rapier and cloak fight, & the rapier & glove of mail fight, all these fights by reason of the imperfection of the rapier, and the rapier fight, are also imperfect fights, for proof of the uncertainty and impossibilities of the safety in any of these fights, thus it stands. These fights depend altogether upon variable fight and close fight. In any of these fights it is impossible in true space of offense to keep the blades of their rapiers from crossing, or from breaking with the poniards, buckler, cloak or breaking or catching with the glove of mail, because in any of these two fights, the agent has still in true space the blade of the patients rapier to work upon. These things by letters

cannot be made more plain, neither is it unknown to the skilful, or in fight by any means to be avoided. The weapon being too far in true space to be wrought upon, the place cannot be denied, do the patient Agent what he can for his life to the contrary, either by blows, thrusts, falsing or doubling of thrusts, going back, indirections, or turnings of the body, or what else soever may in the highest touch of wit or strength, or agility of body be devised or done, to keep out the agent: but still the agent by narrowness of space brings himself by strong guard to the place, where being brought, it is impossible to fight safe, as it is for two desperate men set together being both blind. Because in the true place (won in rapier or variable fight) their eyes by the swift motions of their hands are deceived, the crosses in that fight are false, their distance, judgement and times are lost, either to offend in safety, or safely to defend themselves, and these reasons, rules, or grounds of the feats of arms are infallible or invincible.

Now, oh you Italian teachers of defence, where are your Stocatas, Imbrocatas, Mandrillas, Puntas, & Punta Reversas, Stramisons, Passatas, Carricados, Amazzas, & Incartatas, & playing with your bodies, removing with your feet a little aside, circlewise winding of your bodies, making of three times with your feet together, marking with one eye the motion of the adversary, & with the other eye the advantage of thrusting? What is become of all these juggling gambols, apish devices, with all the rest of your squint eyed tricks, when as through your deep studies, long practices, & apt bodies, both strong and agile, you have attained to the height of all these things? What then avails it you, when you shall come to fight for your lives with a man of skill? You shall have neither time, nor place, in due time to perform any one of them, nor gardant nor open fight safely to keep out a man of skill, a man of no skill, or scholar of your own teaching, from the true place, the place of safety, the place of uncertainty or mischief, the place of wounds or death, but are enforced to stand in that mischievous, uncertain, dangerous, and most deadly place, as two men having lost in part their chiefest senses, most furiously with their rapiers or poniards, wounding or slaying each other.

Thus ends the imperfect fights of the rapier with all manner of weapons or instruments thereto appertaining, with their imperfections, through the true grounds and rules of the art of arms, truly displayed & brought to light.

All laud be unto the Almighty God.

**That the reasons used by the Italian fencers in commending the use of the rapier and poniard, because it makes peace, makes against themselves.**

37

It has been commonly held, that since the Italians have taught the rapier fight, by reason of the dangerous use thereof, it has bred great civility among our English nation, they will not now give the lie, nor with such foul speeches abuse themselves, therefore there are fewer frays<sup>(26)</sup> in these times than were wont to be. It cannot be denied but this is true, that we are more circumspect of our words, and more fearful to fight than heretofore we have been. But whereof comes it? Is it from this, that the rapier makes peace in our minds; or from hence, that it is not so sufficient defence for our bodies in our fight? He that will fight when he is armed, will not fight when he is naked: is it therefore good to go naked to keep peace? he that would fight with his sword and buckler, or sword and dagger, being weapons of true defence, will not fight with his rapier and poniard, wherein no true defence or fight is perfect: are these insufficient weapons therefore the better, because not being sufficient to defend us in fight, they force us into peace? What else is it, but to say, it is good for subjects to be poor, that they not go to law: or to lack munition, that they may not fight, nor go to the wars: and to conclude, what more follows through the imperfect

works of the Italian peacemakers? They have made many a strong in his fight weak, many a valiant man fearful, many a worthy man trusting to their imperfect fight, has been slain, and many of our desperate boys and young youths, to become in that rapier fight, as good men as England yielded, and the tallest men of this land, in that fight as very boys as they and no better. This good have the Italian teachers of Offense done us, they have transformed our boys into men, and our men into boys, our strong men into weakness, our valiant men doubtful, and many worthy men resolving themselves upon their false resolutions, have most willfully in the field, with their rapiers ended their lives. And lastly, have left to remain among us after their deaths, these inconveniences behind them, false fencing books, imperfect weapons, false fights, and evil customs, whereby for lack of use and practice in perfect weapons and true fight, we are disabled for the service of our prince, defence of our country, and safety of our lives in private fight.

## **That the short sword has the advantage against the long sword or long rapier.**

38

Whereas for the most part opinions are generally held, that the long sword, or long rapier, has the vantage in fight against the short sword, which the Italian teachers of defence, by their false demonstrations have brought us to believe. I have thought good that the truth may appear which has the vantage, to add my help unto the reasons they use in their own behalf, for that yet I could never hear them make a sound reason for the same. These are the reasons(27). First with my long rapier, I will put myself into my guard or Stocata, holding my hilt back by the outside of my right thigh, keeping in short the point of my rapier, so as he that has the short sword, shall not be able to reach the point of my rapier, to make his ward or cross with his dagger, buckler, sword, or cloak, without stepping in with his foot, the which time is too long to answer the time of the hand, by reason of my distance. I can there stand safe without danger of blow or thrust, playing the patient's part. If you strike or thrust you do it too short, by reason of my distance. If you seek to come nearer, you must do it with the time of your foot, in which time I may safely thrust home. If in that distance you break it not, you are slain. If you do break it, yet you do me no harm, by reason of my distance, and I may stand fast and thrust again, or fly back at my pleasure. So have you put yourself in danger of your life, and having hardly escaped, are driven again to begin a new bout, as at the first you did. Again, if I please, I can be the oppressor, keeping the same guard, and my point in short as I did before, and pressing strongly by putting in by little and little of my feet, until the place of my foot is gotten, wherein (in my judgement) I may thrust home, the which I may boldly and safely do, without respect of any ward at all, by reason of my distance, in which time of my coming he must strike, thrust, ward, or go back. If he goes back, it is a great disgrace, if he strikes or thrusts, it is too short, if he stands to defend, the place being already gotten, where I may thrust home, the thrust being very quick & strongly made, such is the force and swiftness thereof, that it is impossible by nature or art, for any man to break one thrust of an hundred. These reasons in my opinion may suffice to confirm the wise, that there is no question to be made, but that the long rapier has the advantage against the short sword.

Sir you have prettily handled your discourse(28), concerning the vantages of the long rapier against the short sword, especially at the first show, and according to common sense, but for the substance and truth of the true fight, you have said nothing, because for the performance of any of your allegations, you have neither true pace, place, time, nor space. These are the reasons. Your pace of necessity must be too large, because otherwise you cannot keep safe the point of your long rapier, from the cross of the short sword, unless you will with a narrow pace keep back your hilt so far, that the space of your offense will be too large or too long in distance, and your body unapt to move and thrust both strong and quick in due time, nor aptly to keep your distance, to win the place with your feet, to thrust home. So now you may plainly

see, if you have skill in the art or science of defence, that is to perform anything which you have alleged, you have neither true pace, place, time nor space. But if you will stand upon the largeness of your pace, to keep back or save the point of your long rapier from the ward or cross of the short sword, or upon your Passatas, in all these you have great disadvantages. And these are my reasons. Your number will be too great, as thus. Whenever you mean out of your large pace to thrust home, you must of necessity make four times with your feet, and one with your hand, or two times with your feet, and one with your hand at least. And whensoever you make any of your passages, the number of your feet are greater than the greatest of any of these times done out of the large pace. But the patient with his short sword, to avoid you, or disappoint you of your thrust, has but one time with his foot, at or before the which time, as he in his judgement shall find you in your motion, has by the slow and great number of your motions or times, sufficient time safely out of all danger to make himself ready to take his cross with his short sword. Now sir, whether you thrust or not thrust, whether you play the part of an agent, or patient, it helps you nothing, for he that has the short sword has four times or motions against the long rapier, namely bent, spent, lying spent, and drawing back, in all manner of fights these are to be observed both by the patient and agent. Now note, he that has the long rapier must of necessity play upon one of these four motions, or be patient, which soever he shall do, he is still in great danger of the cross of the short sword, because if he is agent, his number is too great, he falls into one of the four motions, the patient with his short sword, having but the time of his hand, or hand & foot, safely upon these actions or times takes his cross with the short sword. That being done, he presently uncrosses and strikes or thrusts at his pleasure him that has the long rapier, in the head, face, or body. Now here is again to be noted, that when the cross is made, if he that has the long rapier stands fast, he is wounded presently in the uncrossing of the short sword, if he steps or leaps back to save himself, yet the time of the hand being swifter than the time of the foot, overtakes him, with blow or thrust in the arm, hand, head, face and body. Now if he that has the long rapier will be patient & make no play, but lie still watching to make his thrust or Stocata just in the coming or moving of the agent's feet with his short sword, then he has as great disadvantage as he had when he was patient, because then the agent with his short sword has but hand and foot to make his cross, which is most safely to be done in that time, which we call bent, and is as impossible for the rapier man to prevent, as it is for an unskillful to strike or thrust just together with a man of skill. Then thus do I conclude, that he that fights with a long rapier, against him that fights with short sword, can do nothing in due time to defend himself, or hurt the other, but is still in danger of his life, or at the mercy of him that has the short sword, or else has no safe way to help himself, but only Cob's Traverse(29). This Cob was a great quarreler, and did delight in great bravery to give foul words to his betters, and would not refuse to go into the field to fight with any man, and when he came to the field, would draw his sword to fight, for he was sure by the cunning of his traverse, not to be hurt by any man. For at any time finding himself overmatched would suddenly turn his back and run away with such swiftness, that it was thought a good horse would scarce take him. And this when I was a young man, was very much spoken of by many gentlemen of the Inns of the Court, and was called Cob's Traverse and those that had seen any go back too fast in his fight, would say, he did tread Cob's Traverse.

**George Silver his military riddle, truly set down between the perfection and imperfection of fight. Containing the handling of the four fights, wherein true consists the whole sum and full perfection of the true fight, with all manner of weapons, with an invincible conclusion.**

Gardant fight stays, puts back, or beats gardant fight.

Open fight stays, puts back, or beats open fight.

Variable fight answers variable fight in the first distance, and not otherwise, except it be with perfect length against imperfect.

Close fight is beaten by gardant fight.

Variable close & gardant fight, beats gardant fight, open fight, variable fight, and close fight.

Gardant fight in the imperfection of the agent or patient, wins the half sword, and presently the close, and whosoever first ventures the close, loses it, and is in great danger of death, and not possible to escape or get out again without great hurt.

There attends most diligently upon these four fights four offensive actions, which we call certain, uncertain, first, before, just, and afterward. They are to be performed through judgement, time, measure, number and weight, by which all manner of blows thrusts, falses, doubles, or slips, are prevented, or most safely defended. And thus ends my riddle.

Now follows the conclusion, that whosoever shall think or find himself in his fight too weak for the agent's, or patient agent, and therefore, or by reason of his drunkenness, or unreasonable desperateness shall press within the half sword, or desperately run in of purpose to give hurt, or at least for taking of one hurt, to give another, shall most assuredly be in great danger of death or wounds, and the other shall still be safe and go free.

Veritas vincit.

## **A BRIEF NOTE OF THREE ITALIAN TEACHERS OF OFFENSE(30)**

There were three Italian teachers of offense in my time. The first was Signior Rocco, the second was Jeronimo, that was Senior Rocco his boy, that taught gentlemen in the Black Friars, as usher for his master in stead of a man. The third was Vincentio. This Senior Rocco came into England about some thirty years past. He taught the noblemen & gentlemen of the court. He caused some of them to wear leaden soles in their shoes, the better to bring to nimbleness of the feet in their fight. He disbursed a great sum of money for the lease of a fair house in Warwick lane, which he called his college, for he thought it great disgrace for him to keep a fence school, he being then thought to be the only famous master of the art of arms in the whole world. He caused to be fairly drawn and set round about his school all the noblemen's and gentlemen's arms that were his scholars, and hanging right under their arms their rapiers, daggers, gloves of mail and gauntlets. Also, he has benches and stools, the room being very large, for gentlemen to sit round about his school to behold his teaching. He taught none commonly under twenty, forty, fifty, or a hundred pounds. And because all things should be very necessary for the noblemen & gentlemen, he had in his school a large square table, with a green carpet, done round with a very broad rich fringe of gold, always standing upon it a very fair Standish covered with crimson velvet, with ink, pens, pen-dust, and sealing wax, and quivers of very excellent fine paper gilded, ready for the noblemen & gentlemen (upon occasion) to write their letters, being then desirous to follow their fight, to send their men to dispatch their business. And to know how the time passed, he had in one corner of his school a clock, with very fair large dial. He had within his school, a room the which was called the privy school, with many weapons therein, where he did teach his scholars his secret fight, after he had perfectly taught them their rules. He was very much beloved in the court.

There was one Austin Bagger, a very tall gentleman of his hands, not standing much upon his skill, but carrying the valiant heart of an Englishman, upon a time being merry among his friends, said he would go

fight with Signior Rocco, presently went to Signior Rocco his house in the Blackfriars, and called to him in this manner: Signior Rocco, you are thought to be the only cunning man in the world with your weapon, you that takes upon yourself to hit any Englishman with a thrust upon any button, you that takes upon yourself to come over the sea, to teach the valiant noblemen and gentlemen of England to fight, you cowardly fellow, come out of your house if you dare for your life, I am come to fight with thee. Signior Rocco, looking out at a window, perceiving him in the street to stand ready with his sword and buckler, with his two hand sword drawn, with all speed ran into the street, and manfully let fly at Austin Bagger, who most bravely defended himself, and presently closed with him, and struck up his heels, and cut him over the breech, and trod upon him, and most grievously hurt him under his feet. Yet in the end Austin of his good nature gave him his life, and there left him. This was the first and last fight that ever Signior Rocco made, save once at Queen Hith he drew his rapier upon a waterman, where he was thoroughly beaten with oars and stretchers, but the odds of their weapons were as great against his rapier, as was his two hand sword against Austin Bagger's sword and buckler, therefore for that fray he was to be excused.

Then came Vincentio and Jeronimo, they taught rapier fight at the court, at London, and in the country, by the space of seven or eight years or thereabouts. These two Italian fencers, especially Vincentio, said Englishmen were strong men, but had no cunning, and they would go back too much in their fight, which was great disgrace unto them. Upon these words of disgrace against Englishmen, my brother Toby Silver and myself, made challenge against them both, to play with them at the single rapier, rapier and dagger, the single dagger, the single sword, the sword and target, the sword and buckler, & two hand sword, the staff, battle axe, and Morris pike, to be played at the Bell Savage upon the scaffold, where he that went in his fight faster back than he ought, of Englishmen or Italian, should be in danger to break his neck off the scaffold. We caused to that effect, five or six score bills of challenge to be printed, and set up from Southwarke to the Tower, and from thence throughout London unto Westminster, we were at the place with all these weapons at the time appointed, within a bow shot of their fence school. Many gentlemen of good account, carried many of the bills of challenge unto them, telling them that now the Silvers were at the place appointed, with all their weapons, looking for them, and a multitude of people there to behold the fight, saying unto them, now come and go with us (you shall take no wrong) or else you are shamed for ever. Do the gentlemen what they could, these gallants would not come to the place of trial. I verily think their cowardly fear to answer this challenge, had utterly shamed them indeed, had not the masters of Defence of London, within two or three days after, been drinking of bottled ale hard by Vincentio's school, in a hall where the Italians must of necessity pass through to go to their school, and as they were coming by, the masters of Defence did pray them to drink with them. But the Italians being very cowardly, were afraid, and presently drew their rapiers. There was a pretty wench standing by, that loved the Italians. She ran with outcry into the street: "Help! Help! The Italians are like to be slain." The people with all speed came running into the house, and with their capes and such things as they could, parted the fray, for the English masters of Defence, meant nothing less than to soil their hands upon these two faint hearted fellows. The next morning after, all the court was filled, that the Italian teachers of fence had beaten all the masters of defence in London, who set upon them in a house together. This won the Italian fencers their credit again, and thereby got much, still continuing their false teaching to the end of their lives.

The Vincentio proved himself a stout man not long before he died, that it might be seen in his lifetime he had been a gallant, and therefore no marvel he took upon him so highly to teach Englishmen to fight, and to set forth books of the feats of arms. Upon a time at Wels in Somersetshire, as he was in great bravery among the many gentlemen of good account, with great boldness he gave out speeches, that he had been thus many years in England, and since the time of his first coming, there was not yet one Englishman, that could touch him at the single rapier, or the rapier and dagger. A valiant gentleman being there among the rest, his English heart did rise to hear this proud boaster, secretly sent a messenger to one Bartholomew Bramble, a friend of his, a very tall man of both his hands and person, who kept a school of defence in the town. The messenger by the way made the master of defence acquainted with the mind of the gentleman



that sent for him, and of all what Vincentio had said. This master of defence presently came, and among all the gentlemen with his cap off, prayed master Vincentio, that he would be pleased to take a quart of wine with him. Vincentio very scornfully looking upon him, said unto him: "Wherefore should you give me a quart of wine?" "Merry sir" said he, "because I hear you are a famous man at your weapon." Then presently said the gentleman that sent for the master of defence: "He is a man of your profession." "My profession?" said Vincentio, "What is my profession?" Then said the the gentleman, "He is a master of the noble science of defence." "Why," said Vincentio "God made him a good man." But the master of defence would not thus leave him, but prayed him again he would be pleased to take a quart of wine of him. Then said Vincentio: "I have no need of your wine." Then said the master of defence: "Sir I have a school of defence in the town, will it please you to go thither?" "Your school?" said master Vincentio, "What shall I do at your school?" "Play with me (said the master) at the rapier and dagger, if it please you." "Play with you?" said master Vincentio, "If I play with you, I will hit you 1, 2, 3, 4 thrusts in the eye together." Then said the master of defence: "If you can do so, it is the better for you, and the worse for me, but surely I can hardly believe that you can hit me. But yet once again I heartily pray you good sir, that you will go to my school and play with me." "Play with you?" said master Vincentio (very scornfully), "by God let me scorn to play with you." With the word scorn, the master of defence was very much moved, and up with his great English fist, and struck master Vincentio such a box on the ear that he fell over and over, his legs just against a buttery hatch, whereon stood a great black jack. The master of defence fearing the worst, against Vincentio his rising, caught the black jack into his hand, being more than half full of beer. Vincentio lustily started up, laying his hand upon his dagger, & with the other hand pointed with his finger, saying, very well: "I will cause to lie in the Gaile for this geare(?), 1, 2, 3, 4 years." And well said the master of defence: "Since you will drink no wine, will you pledge me in beer? I drink to all cowardly knaves in England, and I think you to be the very most coward of them all." With that he cast all the beer upon him, notwithstanding Vincentio having nothing but his gilt rapier, and dagger about him, and the other for his defence the black jack, would not at that time fight it out: but the next day met with the master of defence in the street, and said unto him: "you remember how misused a me yesterday, you were to blame, me being an excellent man, me teach you to thrust two feet further than any Englishman, but first come you with me." Then he brought him to a mercers shop, and said to the mercer: "Let me see your best silken points." The mercer then did presently show him some of seven groats a dozen. Then he paid fourteen groats for two dozen, and said to the master of defence: "There is one dozen for you, and one dozen for me." This was one of the valiant fencers that came from beyond the seas, to teach Englishmen how to fight, and this was one of the many frays, that I have heard of, that ever he made in England, wherein he showed himself a far better man in his life, than in his profession he was. For he professed arms, but in his life a better Christian. He set forth in print a book for the use of the rapier and dagger, the which he called his practice, I have read it over, and because I find therein neither true rule for the perfect teaching of the true fight, nor true ground of the true fight, neither sense nor reason for due proof thereof. I have thought it frivolous to recite any part therein contained: yet that the truth thereof may appear, let two men being well experienced in the rapier and dagger fight, chose any of the best branches in the same book, & make trial with force and agility, without which the truth between the true & false fight cannot be known, & they shall find great imperfections therein. And again, for proof that there is no truth, neither in his rules, grounds or rapier fight, let trial be made in this manner(31). Set two unskillful men together at the rapier and dagger, being valiant, and you shall see, that once in two bouts there shall either one or both of them be hurt. Then set two skillful men together, being valiant at the rapier and dagger, and they shall do the like. Then set a skillful rapier and dagger man, the best that can be had, and valiant man having no skill together at rapier & dagger, and once in two bouts upon my credit in all the experience I have in fight, the unskillful man, do the other what he can for his life for the contrary, shall hurt him, and most commonly if it were in continuance of fight, you shall see the unskillful man to have the advantage. And if I should choose a valiant man for service of the prince, or to take part with me or any friend of mine in a good quarrel, I would chose the unskillful man, because unencumbered with false fights, because such a man stands free in his valor with strength and agility of body, freely takes the benefit of nature, fights

most brave, by loosing no opportunity, either soundly to hurt his enemy, or defend himself. But the other standing for his defence, upon cunning Italian wards, Punta reversa, the Imbrocata, Stocata, and being fast tied unto these false fights, stands troubled in his wits, and nature thereby racked through the largeness or false lyings or spaces, whereby he is in his fight as a man half maimed, loosing the opportunity of times and benefit of nature, & whereas before being ignorant of these false rapier fights, standing in the free liberty of nature given to him by God, he was able in the field with his weapons to answer the most valiant man in the world, but now being tied unto that false, fickle uncertain fight, thereby has lost in nature his freedom, is now become scarce half a man, and every boy in that fight is become as good a man as himself.

Jeronimo: this gallant was valiant, and would fight indeed, and did, as you shall hear. He being in a coach with a wench that he loved well, there was one Cheese, a very tall man, in his fight natural English, for he fought with his sword and dagger, and in rapier fight had no skill at all. This Cheese having a quarrel to Jeronimo, overtook him upon the way, himself being on horseback, did call to Jeronimo, and bade him come forth of the coach or he would fetch him, for he was come to fight with him. Jeronimo presently went forth of the coach and drew his rapier and dagger, put himself into his best ward or Stocata, which ward was taught by himself and Vincentio, and by them best allowed of, to be the best ward to stand upon in fight for life, either to assault the enemy, or stand and watch his coming, which ward it should seem he ventured his life upon, but howsoever with all the fine Italianated skill Jeronimo had, Cheese with his sword within two thrusts ran him into the body and slew him. Yet the Italian teachers will say, that an Englishman cannot thrust straight with a sword, because the hilt will not suffer him to put the forefinger upon the blade, nor to hold the pommel in the hand, whereby we are of necessity to hold fast the handle in the hand. By reason whereof we are driven to thrust both compass and short, whereas with the rapier they can thrust both straight and much further than we can with the sword, because of the hilt. And these are the reasons they make against the sword.

## FINIS

1 English masters of defence, are profitable members in the commonwealth, if they teach with ancient English weapons of true defence, weight and convenient length, within the compass of their statures and strength of men to command, because it makes them safe, bold, valiant, hardy, strong, and healthful, and victorious in wars, service of their Prince, defence of their friends and country. But the rapier in reason not to be taught, because it makes men fearful and unsafe in single combat, and weak & unserviceable in wars.

2 To this it will be objected, that in the wars we use few rapiers, or none at all, but short swords. To that I answer: Those are insufficient also, for that they have no hilts, whereby they are insufficient in their defence, and especially for the hand, which being struck although with a very small blow, most commonly is the loss of a man, because the force of his hand being taken from him, he is neither able to defend his life, nor greatly to offend his enemy. And again, since the rapier-fight has been taught, for lack of practice they have lost the use of the blow.

3 Why should we leave the hand naked, since thereby our limbs & lives are defended, our enemies discomforted, wounded, and executed? I see no reason but that the hand should be as well armed and provided for, as any other part of the body.

4 A great favor to give them choice of their weapons, because professors of arms ought to be skillful with all manner of weapons.

5 Yet they persuade us that the cross of the rapier without hilt or gauntlet is sufficient.

6 No fight perfect that is not done in force & true time.

7 These counterfeit shows are enough to carry the wisest that know not the true fight from the false, out of the right way.

8 And if their weapons were short, as in times past they were, yet they could not thrust safe at body or face, because in guardant fight they fall over, or under the perfect cross of the sword & to strike beneath the waist, or at the legs, is a great disadvantage, because the course of the blow to the legs is too far, & thereby the head, face & body is discovered. And that was the cause in old time, that they did not thrust or strike at the legs, & not for lack of skill, as is these days we imagine. Again, if man in these days should have fought with a long sword, they would presently have put him into Gobb's Traverse.

9 A confutation of their errors.

10 This in truth cannot be denied.

11 The blow more dangerous than the thrust.

12 A blow cuts off the hand, the arm, the leg, and sometimes the head.

13 He that gives the first wound with a strong blow, commands the life of the other.

14 In the wars there is no observation of Stocatas, Imbrocatas, times, nor answers.

15 Long weapons imperfect.

16 If the sword is longer, you can hardly uncross without going back with your feet. If shorter, then you can hardly make a true cross without putting in of your feet, the which times are too long to answer the time of the hand. The like reason for the short staff, half pike, forest bill, partisan, or glaive, or such like weapons of perfect length.

17 The eye is deceived by the swift motion of the hand.

18 The dagger is an imperfect ward.

19 The short staff or half pike has the advantage against two sword and dagger men, or two rapiers, poniards, and gauntlets.

20 A question.

21 Answer.

22 Note this.

23 Tall men have the vantage against men of mean stature.

24 Four invincible advantages consist in a tall man against a man of mean stature. Long reach. Short course. Length of weapon. Large pace.

25 If they stand upon breaking with their daggers, he that first wins the place, and thrusts home, hurts the other for lack of the circumference. If both thrust together, they are both sped, because their spaces of defence are too wide to answer the time of the hand, and by the swift motion thereof, the eye in that distance is by the same deceived. The feet in their course, but not in the first motion, always note for the avoiding of great errors.

26 There are fewer frays, but more valiant gentlemen slain now than were then.

27 These reasons are used by the Italians.

28 A confutation of the Italians' reasons.

29 Cob's Traverse.

30 I write not this to disgrace the dead, but to show their impudent boldness and insufficiency in performance of their profession when they were living, that from henceforth this brief note may be a remembrance and warning to beware of (bad advise?).

31 Proofs against the rapier fight.

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